

A
STATE of the CASE,
AND A
NARRATIVE of FACTS,

Relating to

The late Commotions, and Rifing of the Weavers, *at*
in the County of GLOCESTER;

As it Regards

A PETITION now presented to the Hon. HOUSE of COMMONS

By the Body of CLOTHIERS, and others,

Concerned in the Clothing Manufactory of STROUD-WATER,
and Parts adjacent.



L O N D O N :

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INTRODUCTION.

THE late commotions amongst the weavers of the county of *Glocester*, having occasioned various reports reflecting upon the characters of the general body of the clothiers ; in vindication of the latter, the following state of the case, and narrative of facts, are now offered to the candid consideration of the publick : Which is thought more especially necessary at this time, as a petition is drawn up, and intended to be presented to the honourable house of commons by the clothiers, and others concerned in the labouring branches of the trade, praying relief from certain grievances and impediments the trade is subjected to by a late act of parliament, and the attempts made to put the same into execution ; which, however well designed, have actually tended to encourage a spirit of discontent, riot, and commotion, before imbibed by the weavers, and which has already been productive of great injury and distress to themselves, and all others dependent on the manufactory.

Too apt is mankind in general to be prejudiced by the first representation of things, more especially when the informant has the address to insinuate himself under the artful disguise

of distress, occasioned by the oppression of those he would thereby accuse, and when he has at will a falling tear to excite compassion*. Nothing has been wanting of this nature that could influence the human heart; no lies nor misrepresentations have been spared to calumniate a respectable body of reputable tradesmen. Many idle and dissolute fellows, never bred up to the weaving trade, finding the advantage of such a disguise, have stiled themselves *journeymen weavers*, and rambled about the country to a considerable distance, exacting alms under that denomination: Nor have there been wanting some to believe and countenance the greatest absurdities, and the most incredible stories. An instance that now occurs to me I shall give in this place, which the relator, a citizen of *Glocester*, of no mean station, told with a very grave and pitiful face, (to a worthy clergyman) who being questioned about the belief of his own story, seemed to give it countenance as a fact.

Two journeymen weavers, during the late disturbances, having strolled about the country, to excite or extort relief, called at a house; and after inveighing (according to their accustomed rant) most bitterly against the oppression and tyranny of the clothiers, one of them (in order I suppose more effectually to draw compassion and inflame resentment in his too credulous hearers) protested, that when he left home, his wife was boiling a dog for the sustenance of herself and perishing family; the other (not willing to be outdone) replied, that for his part, he should

* We are told that one of the weavers, sent up by their body to solicit their late bill, made use of this kind of rhetoric before the committee of the house of commons.

have been glad of a dog to eat, his family not having fared so well for many days past.

That in a populous country (such is the clothing part of *Gloucestershire*) in a dead time of trade, and when bread is exceedingly dear, there should be many distressed objects, will not be wondered at by the judicious; nor will it encourage any disingenuous thought, or reflection, in those that are unprejudiced; for what part of *England* is there at this time exempted from them? But when such ridiculous stories are countenanced, and propagated, not only by the *meaner vulgar*, with a view to cast dirt on a whole body; insinuating that the oppression of their work-people is the cause of such distress; I know not which to impute it to, folly or wickedness: or which of these motives is most detestable, or deserves most to be exposed,---as the consequence of propagating such calumnies must have been fatal to many of the clothiers, (which was every day threatened) had not a military force happily arrived for their protection.

The clothiers have not only been calumniated, and aspersed in their characters, by foolish stories and misrepresentations, but the mob also has been encouraged, irritated, and amused, by promises, hopes, and flattering expectations; which those who countenanced them were incapable of executing: this consequently kept alive the agitated spirit amongst the weavers, and hindered them from returning to their work for several weeks, to the great prejudice not only of themselves, but to the annoyance of the whole country. The loss of their labour and lett to others (which is irretrievable) during the time of their commotions, amounts at the very lowest calculation to 15000*l.* and upwards.

By leaning too confidently on broken reeds, I fear the deluded weavers have drawn themselves into real poverty, and involved

the other branches of the manufactory in almost equal distress. Though few at present want employment, yet the late long vacation has reduced them very low, and run them farther in debt than they will soon recover. Far be it from my intention to harden any heart that feels for them; my own is equally sensible with the most compassionate; and I can pity even that distress which is brought upon them by their own folly and discontent, and wrought up into rage and acts of violence: however the clothiers have been represented, there are not wanting, amongst them, many who have equal fellow-feeling, who have both abilities and inclination, notwithstanding all past provocation, to remedy any real grievance they may at any time labour under.

The clothiers do not desire to have it in their power to oppress the weavers, but only to be enabled to keep up that due subordination amongst their own servants, which ought to be religiously preserved in all communities of men. This application to parliament is intended to heal, not inflame, the wound; to restore a settled calm,* and establish peace, content, and happiness, in the minds of those, where at present there is only a temporary cessation, arising from necessity; and no one knows how soon it may break out again into rage and violence, unless some salutary means be found out to digest the corrosive humours that remain, and save a sinking trade from ruin.

I shall only add, that neither in this introduction, nor in the following sheets, any thing is asserted as fact, but what is grounded on substantial evidence; such as shall be produced to the publick, if requested by any person who thinks himself imposed upon, or aggrieved by them.

Stroud, January 12th, 1757.

The EDITOR.

ERRATUM. Page 21, line 5, for *ends of the thrum*, read, *ends and thrum*.



A

STATE of the CASE, &c.

IN order fairly to state this case to the publick, the original sources of the late commotions and rising amongst the weavers, must be distinguished from the more immediate causes which set them into that violent agitation : The former may be ascribed to the decay of trade, the intemperance and bad oeconomy of the labouring manufacturers in general, and the increase of the number of weavers in proportion to other workmen employed in the manufacture ; and to this may be added the dearness of provisions : all which I will distinctly consider.

I. To the first I have good authority to say, that within the last five years there has been lost by the foreign trade carried on in this country, 50,000*l.* by bankruptcies, fall of goods, and want of sales, from the incroachment of the *French* in their trade

trade upon us, whose labouring manufacturers work much cheaper than ours; and consequently they are enabled to undersell us. This has obliged many clothiers to lay down their trade, and some to reduce it; and many others are now inclined totally to decline their business. This latter need not be wondered at, when it is considered what vast quantities of cloth belonging to the clothiers in this neighbourhood, are now lying upon hand in Blackwell-hall, and other places; which at the most moderate calculation amount to upwards of 150,000 *l.* and were I to set the value at 200,000 *l.* I should not exceed the truth. Hence it will appear, that want of employment is the chief ground of the weavers complaints.

II. It is the misfortune of *England* in general, that our labouring manufacturers live much more luxuriously than those in any other country; but perhaps no place here more noted than ours for it, where good oeconomy is less practised and intemperance more prevalent, than in any other part of the kingdom. I need give no other evidence of their intemperance, than what has been taken from the excise books, and calculated by a very judicious officer settled in this neighbourhood. It appears that in the last year, ending *July* 5th, 1756, that in one street only, in the little town of *Stroud*, containing in length not more than two hundred yards, there were, notwithstanding the great price of corn, brewed and entered for retailing, two thousand four hundred barrels of ale, besides small beer, a vast number of hogheads of cyder, and incredible quantities of spiritous liquors, and as much consumed, within that time, in the publick houses; and by computation made by the same officer, of the money spent in the last year, ending

July 5th, 1756, in the town of *Stroud*, and the clothing-country just round about it, upon ale, cyder, and spiritous liquors; it appears the same did not amount to less than 50,000 *l.* and some years, when trade has been brisker, it has amounted to near 70,000 *l.* and this vast sum (as there is very little travelling that way) must be chiefly spent by the labouring manufacturers. Their bad oeconomy appears in many instances; such as their not going to market for their common necessaries, but buying them, at the worst hand, at huckster's shops; not baking their own bread, but eating baker's, the whitest and most delicate that can be made; not cultivating their gardens as they might do, though very few of the cottages are without them, which obliges them to use less garden-stuff than they ought to do, and to procure what they do use, at a dearer rate: and many other little incidents in their private management are apparently bad, which they might remedy, were they tractable, and better acquainted with the management of the poor in many other parts of *England*, where whole families are supported for one half that our manufacturers, when well employed, can earn, and yet appear more decent, and are better satisfied with it.

III. The increase of the number of weavers in proportion to other workmen employed in the manufacture, is the third thing I intended to take notice of. The master-weavers make great advantages from taking apprentices; which will appear in the course of this narrative; and it is observable, that the boys apprenticed by the parishes are generally placed to weavers, because they may be put out to them younger than almost to any other business: the weavers will take them for

little money, and provide for them wholly, till they are out of their time; these considerations have made the practice of late years almost general, which has occasioned the increase of their numbers to be much greater in proportion; than any other branches of the manufacture, who cannot with any convenience, and rarely do, take any apprentices.

IV. It will be unnecessary to enlarge upon the last head, as the dearth of provisions in general is too well known; and therefore I shall only remark, that the great numbers of inhabitants collected in this country, in order to carry on the manufactory, have made corn, provisions, and every other produce of the lands, generally dearer than in almost any part of the kingdom.

These being the more remote sources of our late disturbances, I am led to their effects, and the mistaken methods that have been pursued, in order to remove them:—hence the more immediate causes of their breaking out into a flame, to the terror and confusion of the whole country, will evidently appear.

The spirit of murmur and discontent amongst the weavers, shewed itself about two years ago, when the decay of the foreign trade began more sensibly to be felt by them; ever since which, they have been caballing, and raising funds, for making an application to parliament, which accordingly they did the last sessions. The chief substance of the act they obtained (which is now become matter of grievance) will appear in the memorial presented by the clothiers at the quarter-sessions; I shall therefore omit to take any farther notice of it in this place.

A ques-

A question will here naturally arise : how came the clothiers not to oppose this bill, before it was passed into a law ?

The weavers petition to the house of commons was presented, a committee appointed to examine into it, a bill ordered to be drawn up, carried into the house, once read, and ordered to be printed, before the clothiers were properly apprized of it ; and even then they were amused, by being assured from authority they thought they might rely on, "*That the intentions of the bill were such, that no honest man could object to.*" Nevertheless some clothiers met at *Stroud* on the occasion ; where a gentleman, who acts in the double capacity of a magistrate and counsel, declared, *That the clothiers need not give themselves any trouble about it ; for that he had talked with a member of the house a few days before, who had been principally concerned in promoting the bill, who informed him, that nothing was intended but to amuse the weavers.* The clothiers not having early notice enough, nor being consulted as a body accused, and principally concerned, before such large steps were taken ; and relying too much on the informations which had been given them above-mentioned, and not being apprized of, or foreseeing the consequences that have since arisen, neglected to make any application for opposing the bill.

The weavers, after obtaining the act, but before the quarter-sessions, drew up, and printed, a petition, which (as we are informed) they caused to be presented to every justice within the county. I intended to have here inserted a transcript of the said petition ; but have not been able to procure a copy : the following, however, is an authentic copy of the rate annexed to it.

The TABLE or SCHEME for rates of wages to be paid to the woollen broad-cloth weavers, as made and settled at a general quarter-sessions, held on Tuesday in the week next after the feast of Easter, in the first year of the reign of king George the second.

<i>Hundred of Threads.</i>		<i>Wages.</i>	
4 to 500	} is	Three-pence	per yard;
600		Four-pence	
700		Four-pence half-penny	
800		Five-pence farthing.	
900		Six-pence	
1000		Six-pence half-penny	
1100		Seven-pence farthing	
1200		Eight-pence	
1300		Nine-pence farthing	
1400		Ten-pence half-penny	
1500		Twelve-pence	
1600		Thirteen-pence farthing	
1700		Fourteen-pence half-penny	
1800		Sixteen-pence	
1900		Seventeen-pence farthing	
2000		Twenty-pence	
2100		Twenty-one-pence half-penny	
2200		Twenty-four-pence	

Some clothiers, apprized of the weavers motions, and that a few of the justices had given them encouragement, drew up a paper for their own weavers voluntarily to sign, which many of them did; wherein they acknowledged themselves well satisfied with their then wages, and agreed to work upon the same terms as long as they worked for their respective masters. This produced threatening letters; two of the same import were:

dropt in the court-yard of Mr. *Thomas Roberts*, which, though scarcely worth notice, as a faithful compiler, I shall copy here.

To Mr. Thomas Roberts post paid.

This is to give notice to all weavers not to put their hands to any paper made by Mr. Roberts or any other clothier, if you do, we the weavers of each parish are fully resolved to meet in a body and car him on the wooden horse, and throw him into his masters mill pound where he sign'd the wrighting.

And as for you clothiers we think it not worth your whiles to trouble yourselves with any such thing, if you do be it to your peril, though it is our desire to be at quiet.

The two letters dropt were exactly the same.

They not only threatned, but proceeded much farther with respect to Mr. *Joseph Ellis*; and as this was the first appearance of rioting amongst the weavers, I shall give an exact relation of their behaviour on this occasion.

Mr. *Ellis's* weavers, with great readiness, voluntarily signed the agreement; but as soon as it was known by some of the riotous part of them, they assembled in a large body, and waited on *John Stephens*, esq; one of his majesty's justices of the peace, desiring his advice, in order to stop these agreements from going forward. He informed them, *that unless these contracts were put a stop to, their act of parliament was of no value.* In consequence of this advice, they immediately proceeded to put a total stop to Mr. *Ellis's* trade, by going to his weavers in a tumultuous manner, and obliging those who had signed the agreement, to bring back their work; accompanying them in large bodies, and using insulting language; threatning that all the

the weavers in seven parishes would assemble at his house the following day; and acquainting him, *that the justices were on their side*. To appease these riotous persons, and prevent the impending danger, after several chains had been brought home in one day in the manner described, Mr. *Ellis* thought fit, for his own safety, to send for some principal weavers, and in their presence he destroyed the contract that had been signed.

This was a specimen of what the clothiers were to expect, and leads me to the *Michaelmas* quarter-sessions, where the weavers attended, and presented the following petition to the court.

Gloucestershire.

‘ *To the worshipful the justices of the peace for the said county,*
 ‘ *at their general Michaelmas quarter-sessions assembled, the*
 ‘ *5th October, 1756.*

‘ The humble petition of the several woollen broad-cloth
 ‘ weavers, residing in the several parishes of *Hampton,*
 ‘ *Bisley, Stroud, Paniswick, Wooten Under-Edge, Dursley,*
 ‘ *Horsley, King-Stanley, and Rodborough,* on behalf of
 ‘ themselves, and all the other woollen broad-cloth
 ‘ weavers residing within the county of *Gloucester.*

‘ *Sheweth,*

‘ **T**HAT the wages of woollen broad-cloth weavers in the
 ‘ said county being unsettled, and great complaints being
 ‘ made of the hardships and oppressures which the weavers
 ‘ laboured under thereby, this court of their quarter-sessions of
 ‘ the peace, in the first year of his present majesty’s reign, ap-
 ‘ proving

' proving of a report of *Nathaniel Stephens*, *Thomas Cook*, and
 ' *Charles Tate*, esqrs. three of his majesty's justices of the peace
 ' for the said county, dated the 14th day of *February* then last,
 ' touching the wages of woollen broad-cloth weavers, in the
 ' said county, in pursuance of an order of reference made for
 ' that purpose; and having such conference and consideration
 ' of all necessary circumstances, as by law is directed, touching
 ' weavers wages, did limit, rate, order, and appoint the wages
 ' of woollen broad-cloth weavers for the future, until altera-
 ' tion by proper authority, to be, and to be paid, according to
 ' the number of hundred of threads contained in each respec-
 ' tive chain of woollen broad-cloth, and according to the re-
 ' spective proportions, and sums, rated and expressed in the
 ' table or scheme of rates for wages subjoined to the said order,
 ' and which table or scheme of rates of wages is also hereunto
 ' subjoined.

' That the weavers greatly pleased themselves with the atten-
 ' tion that this court was so good to give to their grievances,
 ' were well satisfied with the said rates, and readily acquiesced
 ' with the said order, hoping that the clothiers (who are their
 ' employers) would also on their part have conformed thereto,
 ' and paid due obedience to the said order, and to the authority
 ' of this court.

' But so far from any such compliance, that the clothiers
 ' treated the said order with the greatest contempt, not any
 ' ways complying therewith; well knowing that as this court
 ' could not inflict any penalty on the non-conformance there-
 ' with, and that the weavers could not bear the expence of
 ' applying to this court on every breach thereof, the good intent

' of

“ of the said order could not be answered, nor the poor unhappy weavers be any ways relieved thereby.

“ That their hardships and sufferings have since increased by the continued oppressions of the clothiers, and the great reduction of their wages; insomuch that the weavers cannot get above four pence for sixteen hours labour upon many sorts of work, whereby their families are thrown upon, and become burthensome to the parishes. They were induced to lay their grievances before the honourable house of parliament, who (for their relief and without any opposition from the clothiers) were pleased to pass an act in the last sessions of parliament, and in the twenty-ninth year of his present majesty's reign, intituled, “ An act to render more effectual an act passed in the twelfth year of the reign of his late majesty king *George*, to prevent all unlawful combinations of workmen employed in the woollen manufactures, and for better payment of their wages; and also an act passed in the thirteenth year of the reign of his said late majesty, for the better regulation of the woollen manufacture, and for preventing disputes among the persons concerned therein, and for limiting a time for prosecuting for the forfeiture appointed by the aforesaid act, in case of the payment of the workmen's wages in any other manner than in money.” Whereby it is (amongst other things) enacted, that from and after the twenty-fourth of June 1756, it shall be lawful for the justices of the peace, assembled at any of their general or quarter-sessions, held next after Michaelmas, yearly, to make rates for the payment of wages to weavers and others employed in the woollen manufacture, according to the number of yards that the chains are laid upon the warping bars, and not otherwise: which rates shall continue

' nue for one year, from the making thereof; and that the said
 ' justices shall yearly in their general or quarter-sessions, either
 ' continue such rates for another year, or alter them in such
 ' manner as they shall think fit, always observing the directions
 ' of the said act for that purpose; and if any maker of mixed
 ' medley, or white broad-cloth, shall not pay to the weaver or
 ' weavers employed by such maker, according to such rates,
 ' every person so offending is to forfeit, and pay, the sum of
 ' five pounds, to be recovered as therein is mentioned.

' That the weavers are not only greatly distressed by the
 ' hardships and oppressions aforesaid, but the clothiers have
 ' also laid the chain four or five yards longer on the bar; and,
 ' instead of paying the weaver in stop-lift cloth two shillings a
 ' cloth for stopping, (being the usual price) they first reduced
 ' it to one shilling, and now refuse to pay any thing, though the
 ' stopping occasions the cloth being one fifth longer in weaving.

' The great hardships which the weavers thus groan under,
 ' and the extreme poverty to which many of them are reduced
 ' thereby, calling for immediate relief, they are induced to
 ' lay their case before your worships, and humbly intreat you
 ' will please to take the same into consideration, by making of
 ' rates for the payment of wages to weavers, and others employ-
 ' ed in the woollen manufactures, in pursuance of, and accord-
 ' ing to, the directions of the said act of parliament; and to
 ' make such order therein, as to your worships shall seem meet;
 ' and your petitioners, as in duty bound, shall for ever pray.'

To this petition the same rate of prices was annexed as in
 the former, which was separately presented to the justices
 previous to the sessions: I shall only observe upon this rate,
 that it was near, upon an average, one third higher than that
 which I shall have occasion hereafter to speak of.

At the same time most of the considerable clothiers attended, and presented to the justices the following memorial, signed by upwards of seventy principal persons.

Copy of a memorial humbly addressed to the worshipful bench of justices assembled at the Boothall in the city of Gloucester, at their general quarter-sessions, held next after Michaelmas, for the county of Gloucester, in the year of our Lord 1756.

‘ **W**Hereas by an act made the last session of parliament, intituled, “ An act to render more effectual an act passed
 “ in the twelfth year of the reign of his late majesty king *George*,
 “ to prevent unlawful combinations of workmen employed in
 “ the woollen manufactures, and for better payment of their
 “ wages; and also an act passed in the thirteenth year of the reign
 “ of his said late majesty, for the better regulation of the woollen
 “ manufacture, and for preventing disputes among the persons
 “ concerned therein; and for limiting a time for prosecuting for
 “ the forfeiture appointed by the aforesaid act, in case of the
 “ payment of workmen’s wages in any other manner than in
 “ money;” It is enacted that it shall be lawful for you, his ma-
 ‘ jesty’s justices of the peace for the county of *Gloucester*, assem-
 ‘ bled at your *Michaelmas* quarter-sessions, to make rates for the
 ‘ payment of wages to weavers, and others employed in the wool-
 ‘ len manufactures, according to the number of yards that the
 ‘ chains are laid upon the warping bars, and not otherwise,
 ‘ and according to the rate of former acts of parliament re-
 ‘ ferred to therein; which said rates shall continue in force for
 ‘ one year from the making them, and are subject to be con-
 ‘ tinued or altered as you shall think fit; and if any maker of
 ‘ mixed medley, or white broad-cloth, shall not pay the weaver
 “ or

' or weavers employed by such maker, according to such rates,
 ' every person so offending shall forfeit and pay the sum of
 ' five pounds: the penalties to be recovered by action of debt,
 ' by any person who shall sue for the same, or may be levied
 ' by distress, upon conviction before any two or more justices
 ' of the peace for the county or place where the offence is
 ' committed; and all appeals to be made to the next general
 ' or quarter-sessions; and all orders at such general or quarter-
 ' sessions relating to the premises are final, and not liable to be
 ' removed by certiorari, or any other form or process of law.
 ' We, the principal clothiers of the county of Gloucester, hav-
 ' ing taken that part of the said act into consideration, and
 ' being convinced of the inexpediency of it, and the impossibi-
 ' lity of putting the same into execution in an equitable man-
 ' ner, do, by these presents, remonstrate against it. And

' First, Because we apprehend that every law, which tends
 ' towards raising the price of labour, (as it must in the end ne-
 ' cessarily advance our manufactures) will be greatly prejudi-
 ' cial to the trade of this nation. Were our manufactures all
 ' consumed at home, it would be of less moment; but as we
 ' have to encounter many potent rivals in foreign markets, who
 ' have grown upon us, (particularly our greatest enemies, *the*
 ' *French*, who, happily for them, have already this great advan-
 ' tage over us, that labour is much cheaper *in France* than here)
 ' we cannot but think it would be more adviseable, in order
 ' to preserve our *little remaining trade*, that, instead of raising
 ' our manufactures, to which this law directly tends, every
 ' scheme should be adopted that would cheapen them, and eve-
 ' ry justifiable method should be used to render them upon ea-
 ' sier terms, to procure the necessaries of life for the labouring
 ' manufacturer at a lower price, and to remove all temptations

‘ to idleness, luxury, and intemperance out of their way :
 ‘ hereby only shall we be enabled to vie with our rivals in
 ‘ foreign markets.

‘ Secondly, Because the execution of this law tends to invert
 ‘ the laws of society, and to destroy that due subordination which
 ‘ ought to be religiously preserved in all communities. The weav-
 ‘ ers by this act will be rendered more our masters than we
 ‘ are now theirs. A levelling and turbulent spirit (to which
 ‘ we have some cause to impute the rise of this new act) ought
 ‘ never to be countenanced amongst the common people, and la-
 ‘ bouring manufacturers of this kingdom, where they have
 ‘ been but too much already imbibed. This has been evident
 ‘ in our own country, formerly, on the like occasion. The same
 ‘ sparks visibly remain, and will be easily blown into a flame ; and
 ‘ the general maxim is apparent from those recent instances and
 ‘ commotions that very lately disturbed several of the nor-
 ‘ thern counties, and which have already proved fatal to them-
 ‘ selves, and the properties of their superiours.

‘ Thirdly, Because the value of weaving is lessened by some
 ‘ alterations in the weaver’s favour, the numbers of sorts and
 ‘ the qualities of the manufactures of this county are greatly in-
 ‘ creased. They are now too various to be reduced to any re-
 ‘ gular or fixed standard ; and it has been found, by expe-
 ‘ rience prior to our days, that these and all other laws for the re-
 ‘ gulation of the price of labour, are not to be reduced to practice,
 ‘ nor expedient to be put into execution. There need no bet-
 ‘ ter evidence of this, than to consider how many of them lie
 ‘ dormant at this time, notwithstanding they are not repealed.

‘ Fourthly, Because we are assured that the honest and in-
 ‘ dustrious weaver, who is a good workman, and has employ-
 ‘ ment

' ment at the rates generally now paid, may get a comfortable
 ' subsistence for himself and family ; and that one single loom,
 ' thus employed, will get from *thirteen* to *eighteen* shillings per
 ' week ; and an increase of wages would only make those who
 ' are now wanting in diligence to become more idle. What
 ' need is there then of innovations ? why must our hands be
 ' tied up by penal laws, whilst others are free ? why must the
 ' first manufacture in the kingdom (for such the woollen is just-
 ' ly esteemed) be put under unnecessary restrictions ? and, if
 ' unnecessary, they must be pernicious ; for trade is a tender
 ' plant, that can only be nursed up by liberty : if you cramp
 ' it, it will die away like untimely fruit. Besides, the persons
 ' employed in weaving are not chosen for their strength or ro-
 ' bustness ; the business is neither laborious nor toilsome ; nor
 ' are weavers, who work under their own roofs, exposed to
 ' those hardships and difficulties which many other trades are
 ' liable to. The weak, the lame, the old and decrepid, the
 ' puny women, and even children, and such whose constitu-
 ' tions and natural abilities are not equal to other employments,
 ' are made weavers. Is it just or reasonable, therefore, that the
 ' labour of such people should be estimated, or put upon a foot-
 ' ing, with men of stronger and more robust constitutions, or
 ' more useful abilities ?

' Fifthly, Because we know it to be a matter of fact, that
 ' it is impossible to rate the price of weaving by the hundred,
 ' (which is the only method yet prescribed) in an equitable
 ' manner ; for one sort of cloth of almost any given hundred,
 ' may be, and is, worth near one fourth more, for the labour of
 ' weaving, than another sort possibly can be, let it be done ever
 ' so well.

Sixthly,

‘ Sixthly, Because the execution of this law will tend to injure the goodness of the manufactory, and hurt the reputation of it, more especially in the *Turkey* trade, where the distinguishing excellence of the cloth consists in the smallness of the spinning, and height of the hundred, as it thereby best imitates the *French* manufactory; for the maker, in order to save something in the weaving, will be tempted to lower the hundred.

‘ Seventhly, Because such as are willing to keep up the reputation of the manufactory, or those who think it better to stand still than to go on under such innovations and restrictions, by taking steps to avoid them, will perhaps be exposed to the resentment of that spirit which has already appeared, and which, once raised, may be productive of the most dangerous consequences.

‘ Eighthly, Because we think it absolutely absurd, and repugnant to the liberties of a free people, and the interest of trade, that any law should supersede a private contract, honourably made between a master and his workman; which we apprehend to be the case of the present, if put into execution, and which we believe cannot be paralleled in that respect by any other law now in use.

‘ Ninthly, Because we apprehend the putting this act into execution, will not only occasion present commotions and confusions, but will pave the way for a fatal migration of our manufactory to some other counties, where it may meet with favour, and be countenanced by gentlemen, and men of the first property, who feel the want of such for the employment of the neighbouring poor, and the consequent improvement of their estates, and enjoy all the advantages of unrestrained liberty.

‘ These revolutions of manufacturies are common from one
I
kingdom

' kingdom to another, thro' good or ill policy. If we look back
 ' but a few centuries, we shall see the *Britons* exporting their
 ' wool into foreign countries, to be manufactured for them.
 ' Thro' the ill policy and bigotry of *Louis XIV.* of *France*, the
 ' looms of *Spital-fields* are now employed to furnish the richest
 ' manufactures of silk for those very countries, from whence we
 ' formerly received them. Internal revolutions of this kind are
 ' not only evident in our own nation; but particularly so in our
 ' own manufactory. The county of *Suffolk*, and some other
 ' places, were formerly the seats of manufacture for woollen
 ' broad-cloths, where it is now hardly known. *Salisbury* and
 ' *Worcester* were celebrated within this last century for the same,
 ' (which the present names of some particular sorts of broad-
 ' cloth, now made amongst us, evince) 'till, under the mistaken
 ' notion of *wise Regulations*, and *salutary Restrictions*, and thro'
 ' the grants of particular privileges, freedoms, and exclusive
 ' charters, they have drove it from them: and *Yorkshire*, within
 ' our own knowledge, hath gained from us some considerable
 ' branches of our trade; because their labouring manufacturers
 ' are better oeconomists, more tractable, temperate, and frugal,
 ' and consequently work cheaper than our's.

' Tenthly and lastly, Because we know of no other county
 ' where the weavers have made any stir about their wages but
 ' this, nor where they have been *encouraged* to attempt at putting
 ' this act into execution. It is our misfortune, rather than our
 ' fault, if, through the present dulness of our trade, some occa-
 ' sions of complaint of the lowness of wages paid to them have
 ' arisen, or that some few members of our body, whom we
 ' would by no means countenance, have taken that advantage
 ' of the times, which it would not have been in their power to
 ' do in a more flourishing trade: but is it equitable that a whole
 ' body

' body of respectable tradesmen should therefore be censured,
 ' and brought under unnecessary and unprecedented restrictions,
 ' such as will be productive of those bad consequences set forth
 ' in these our remonstrances? Why should the weavers be ex-
 ' empted from feeling the effects of bad times any more than
 ' their masters, or any other branches of the manufactory? If
 ' the head and the body suffer, ought not every member to bear
 ' a part? Besides, may we not ask why this county should first
 ' lead the example, especially in these times? Is it a means to
 ' mend our trade? or rather, will it not be a means to spread
 ' the spirit of murmur and discontent into other counties? And,
 ' should those other counties have the wisdom to discountenance
 ' it, will they not have a great advantage over us? But, should
 ' they be so *imprudent* as to follow us, and thereby render the
 ' law general, our foreign rivals will reap the benefit of it: and
 ' the next age may justly reproach the present, for suffering such
 ' unnecessary innovations, because, in all human probability,
 ' they will have the mortification to experience thereby future
 ' migrations in the woollen broad-cloth manufactory, as re-
 ' markable as those that are past, and which we now, thro' the
 ' wisdom, virtue, industry, and good policy of our ancestors, re-
 ' flect upon with pleasure and satisfaction.

' As we have seen a printed paper, under the form of a peti-
 ' tion, which the weavers have procured to be drawn up for
 ' them, and which (as we are informed) they have caused to be
 ' presented to every justice of the peace in the county, to request
 ' their attendance at this sessions, and their assistance in putting
 ' the aforesaid act into execution; therefore, with all deference
 ' and respect to the worshipful bench, we present these our re-
 ' monstrances against that part of the act before recited, which
 ' respects the rating the price of wages to be paid by us to the
 ' weavers;

‘ weavers ; but as to that part of the act which relates to the
 ‘ payment of workmen in any other manner than in money, it
 ‘ is our sincere desire that it should be put into execution in the
 ‘ strictest manner.’

After the petition and memorial were read, the court (which was exceedingly numerous) proceeded to examine into the merits of the respective applications ; and the council for the petitioners having opened the case, the witnesses, in order to support the facts set forth in the petition, were called upon, but they came very short in their evidence, no instance of oppression being proved ; and if it be considered that no clothier, let him be ever so careful, can have all his chains of the same sort equally good for the weaver, and that low wages often arise from the chain being unskilfully set to work, from idleness, in his work, or want of ability in the weaver, little regard will be had to any evidence that appeared there in their favour.

The court having gone thro’ all the evidence that was offered on the part of the weavers, the clothiers were examined, in order to support their memorial. Their evidence principally tended to establish two points, which they fully proved : the one, that the wages paid to the weavers by the generality of the trade were not lessened for a great number of years past ; that the honest and industrious weaver, who is a good workman, and has full employment, by the wages then paid, may get a comfortable subsistence for himself and family ; that one single loom, so employed, will not only earn *from thirteen to eighteen shillings*, (as set forth in the memorial) but to *twenty-one shillings per week, and upwards* : and the other, that the settling of the wages to be paid to weavers by the hundred, was impracticable to be done, in an equitable manner, because the clothier or weaver must frequently be injured by it.

It appeared, in the course of the weavers evidence, that the persons employed to work one single loom were the master, a journeyman, and a child for a quill-winder, who is commonly intitled to one penny out of a shilling: that often the wife, or daughter, or an apprentice-boy, from twelve to fifteen years of age, acts the part of a journeyman, who is intitled to one third of the whole wages paid for such a piece of work, besides small beer, and lodging (if he has no home of his own): that sometimes a journeyman works at the head of a loom, with an apprentice-boy; in which case, if the boy is a learner, the journeyman is intitled to five pence out of a shilling: that often a master-weaver, who keeps two looms employed, hath no journeyman, but only apprentices; and then a quill-winder, who is hired for 1 s. 6 d. *per* week, will supply both the looms. The reasons why a master-weaver has a share so much larger than the journeyman, appeared, by the same evidence, to arise from some few incidental expences, such as candles in winter-time, size, tools, &c. The proportion of the master's neat wages to the journeyman, after all considerations are allowed for, and expences paid, is, upon the average of the trade, as seven shillings to five, or thereabouts.

The court appearing very well satisfied with the evidence that had been given by the clothiers, (of whom only one third were examined) many other instances of sums earned by a single loom in one year, would have appeared upon oath to have amounted from 35 *l.* to 40 *l.* and still stronger might have been produced; I shall instance a few, *Onesiphorus Paul*, Esq; paid last year for one single loom's work done in the year, upwards of 45 *l.* and to a weaver, who kept two looms at work, and employed neither journeyman, nor apprentice, but his own family only, the neat sum of 95 *l.* 14 *s.*

for

for work done in one year, and a day over. *Messieurs* ----- *Joseph Watben* and company, paid last year to a weaver who keeps two looms employed, and seldom has any assistance, but his wife and daughters, near 80*l.* and it being coarse work, in which the ends of the thrum will answer the expence of the flay and harness, and nothing paid out of it for size, it is better than the neat income out of 100*l.* per ann. free land.* And Mr. *Robert Ellis* senior, can give an instance in his trade of one single loom earning lately in one year near 50*l.* If the weavers in general do not earn such wages, it must be imputed either to their negligence, drunkenness, unskilfulness, want of full employment, or to all these causes combined.

The other point which arose for the consideration of the court, and to which the clothiers evidence principally tended, was, that the settling of the wages to be paid to weavers by the hundred, was impracticable to be done, in an equitable manner; because the clothier, or weaver, must frequently be injured by it. It was proved that the highest hundred, or number of threads in the chain, could not ascertain the value of weaving, nor did always deserve the greatest wages. Instances were given, wherein very different prices were paid for cloths of the same hundred, by the same master; and yet the lowest prices often were the best wages: this difference very frequently amounted to twenty or twenty-five per cent upon the value of weaving, and in some particular instances to forty per cent. since no regard is had to the sort of cloth intended to be made, whether thicker or thinner, narrower or wider; whether the spinning of the abb or shoot is larger or smaller, finer or coarser, what breadth the chain is set upon the loom, or what

* This work, by the rate hereafter mentioned, is advanced from 16*s.* to 23*s.* per cloth.

quantity of abb is put into the cloth : to illustrate and confirm this evidence, two skains of abb were produced, intended to be wove on chains of the same hundred, which the same maker made use of ; the one being more than as large again in the size of the thread than the other, consequently must fill up the chain faster, and deserve less wages ; it being a very common thing to shoot *English* and *Spanish* abb, upon chains of the same hundred, and fineness ; though the value of weaving in one must be widely different from the other, and the same disproportion in the fineness and quality of the abb must often happen in lower sorts of goods ; which was sufficiently pointed out by the evidence : yet I shall now give an instance, which was not proved at the sessions.—Mr. *Richard Cook*, of *Lodgmoor*, has for many years, in the regular course of his trade, made two sorts of cloth of the same hundred, or number of threads in the chains ; upon one of which he shoots abb that costs him but 5 *d.* per pound the spinning, for which he pays 25 *s.* per piece for weaving ; upon the other sort he shoots abb that costs him 11 *d.* per pound the spinning, and for which he pays 40 *s.* per piece to the weaver, for the same length ; and upon the lowest price full as good wages are made, as upon the highest : many instances may be given, to prove facts of the same kind ; but, before I dismiss this instance, I cannot help making one remark upon it. If it be considered how many different prices may be paid for the spinning of the abb, from 5 *d.* to 11 *d.* per pound, all which ought to be differently rated in the value of weaving, and that the chain is subjected to the same variation, no other evidence need be given of the impracticability and inequality of making a general rate, to ascertain the wages to be paid to woollen broad-cloth weavers.

Were

Were the number of sorts of cloth as inconsiderable now as they were when the act of the 5th of *Eliz.* was passed, for settling the price of wages, (now almost grown obsolete) and when, perhaps, not more than six or eight sorts were made in the whole county, it might have been possible to have made somewhat of an equitable rate for the price of weaving; but not by the hundred only, because the alteration of the weather or season of the year will make the chains vary in their weight, and different growths of wool will be different in proof. If the chain is new, and the abb stale, or *vice versa*, or the warp sometimes smaller, or sometimes larger, the judicious manufacturer will see necessary occasion to vary his hundred, in order to make the same sort of cloth, that they may be like the sample, or what he usually sells at the same price*.

It also appeared, on evidence given by Mr. *Joseph Wathen*, that by the introduction of a new kind of shuttle, called the bobbing-shuttle, within the last twenty years, the weaver could do the same work one day in eight sooner than they could before: here is a strong instance of the groundlessness of the complaints, respecting the price of wages, made by the weavers.

Though the clothiers candidly admitted in their remonstrances, that some instances of low oppressive wages might have happened, by some members of their body taking advantages of the times, which could not have happened in a more flourishing trade, it appeared by the evidence of Mr. *Thomas Roberts*, that such low wages deserved much less notice than was expected. A weaver, who had worked a considerable time with a clothier, the most noted for beating down the price of

* If the wages to weavers were settled by the hundred and yard, or by any rate; then the most indifferent workman would be entitled to as good wages as the best.

wages, having applied to Mr. *Roberts* for work, because his old master could not employ him. Mr. *Roberts* questioned him about the wages his last master gave him, whether they were not very low? The weaver replied, "*That though they were indeed low, yet that he did very well with them, because the work was done accordingly.*"

From the evidence given to the court (the chief substance of which hath been already recited) though the members of the bench came thither very desirous of giving every relief to the weavers, and had taken all the pains they possibly could to find out a method for settling a rate for their wages, the chairman declared, *That it was the opinion of every gentleman upon the bench, that no equitable rate for settling such wages could be made by any law now in being.*

This disappointment so inflamed the weavers, (many of whom were present in court on the occasion) that they immediately appeared in a riotous and tumultuous manner, and insulted several clothiers upon their return; and, from that time endeavoured to prevent any work being done in their business for above six weeks afterwards; and scarcely any work was done during that time. The weavers breathing out threatnings against the clothiers, especially against those who appeared at the quarter-sessions, the clothiers were under a necessity of procuring arms, and keeping guards about their houses, for the preservation of their property, families, and persons; and many others, who were not so immediately concerned, were under great apprehensions of danger, the mob frequently surrounding their houses in large bodies, and levying contributions.

To quiet these disorders, and restore peace to the country, which was at that time in most terrible confusion, there was a meeting at *Stroud* the eleventh of *October*, the next *Monday* after

after the quarter-sessions, at the desire of some of the managers for the weavers, who requested, in particular, that the clothiers, examined as evidences at the late sessions, would attend, to have a state of the weavers grievances laid before them; and afford them such relief and assistance as they should think proper; and proposed, on their own part, that a few representatives of their body should be there, without riot or tumult. This request, so reasonable in appearance, was readily consented to, not only by those who were particularly requested, but by several other principal clothiers, who attended the said meeting, not without some apprehension of the consequences; when they found that not only the weavers chosen to exhibit their complaints and grievances were assembled, but also a very large body of weavers, and other persons, computed at not less than 2 or 3000, and by some at 4000, were collected from *Kingwood*, and other distant parts; many of whom had no concern in the affair.

The weavers, instead of making an humble representation of their case, produced a copy of the exorbitant rate by the hundred, which they before had caused to be printed in the petition, addressed, and handed by them to the justices, previous to the quarter-session; which rate they (modestly enough at first) requested should be confirmed for them, insinuating that they could not live upon less wages; and being very much pressed to make some more reasonable proposals, because, otherwise it would be impossible for the clothiers to serve them, they absolutely refused, and several of them declared it was much as their lives were worth to accept of any less.

The clothiers, after having used every possible method to soften and bring the weavers to reason, proposed to their managers, that if they would choose out of those present the best
masters

masters in every particular sort of work (having respect both to the chain and abb, and all other circumstances of the trade) they would endeavour that the whole trade should conform to the prices given by such masters, and would themselves set the example; but this did by no means satisfy them.

The clothiers, now in a confined and dangerous situation, in order to extricate themselves, then made the following proposal in writing, which was signed by nineteen of them, all that were present: "Proposed, that the weavers, within one month, "do chuse a committee of eleven or thirteen clothiers, such as "they most approve of, to meet once within one month from "the date hereof, and once a quarter afterwards, to redress the "weavers grievance, by settling the price of wages to be paid "to them; and, in the mean time, we who are here present do "agree to the full scheme of wages now proposed by the "weavers, in all the chains that we shall put out to them hence- "forwards, till such time as the said committee do meet."

Stroud, 11th October, 1756.

But this being read to the multitude, (tho' approved of by some) was rejected in general with indignation, oaths, and curses: their tumult and rage greatly increased, and the clothiers being quite pent up in a room by the mob, who threatened their lives with the most horrid imprecations, if the whole of their request was not complied with, found it necessary, for their own safety, to sign every thing that the weavers demanded, which accordingly they did; one paper being signed, importing their compliance to pay according to the exorbitant rate imposed upon them, *for ever*: other copies thereof, written and signed in the same manner, for the use of every parish, were next insisted on by the mob, which the clothiers were complying with as fast as possible; but the impetuosity of the rioters was so great,
and

and such numbers pressed forwards to enter the room, that before the papers were all compleated, notwithstanding the efforts that were made on the inside by many people, who exerted all their strength to prevent it, they forced open the door, and rushed in like a torrent. In the midst of this confusion, under cover of the night, the clothiers, thinking themselves in the utmost peril of their lives, and to avoid at least the insults that must necessarily have happened, escaped most of them out of the back windows, tho' they were very high from the ground, the room being the second story, and having only one door. A few had not time to escape that way; for the mob having discovered the manner of their escape, and that the chief of their prey were missing, guarded the windows to secure the remainder; two of whom, after some time, having got partly out of the windows, in order to get off, were threatned from below to have their brains knocked out, if they persisted; which obliged them to draw back. In this situation, they found themselves under a necessity of remaining at the mercy of the mob, exposed to all the taunts and insults of mobbish tyranny; some pronouncing threats, whilst others, full of violence and rage, seemed thirsty for blood! 'till partly by art and stratagem, (and their not being the principal objects of resentment) and by the kind assistance of some friends, and faithful servants, who, entering the room by some other windows, and mixing with the crowd, preserved them from harm, and at last effected their deliverance, so that happily no mischief was done; tho' it was concluded, from what was given out by the mob themselves, and overheard by the people of the town, and others, that every clothier in the room was in the utmost danger of his life; and indeed it appears too evidently since, that

this meeting was requested by the weavers, in order to have it in their power premeditatedly to do them an injury.

Notwithstanding the particulars of this riot were published in the *General Evening Post*, (the author of the *Gloucester Journal* being afraid, as he himself declared, to print it) some gentlemen were weak enough (or at least pretended so) to believe that the papers signed by the clothiers at that meeting were voluntary; and kept up the expectations of the mob, by promising them that it should be confirmed at some future sessions.

One circumstance, given in evidence at the quarter-sessions, I have purposely omitted, that I might introduce it in this place. Two eminent and judicious clothiers, in the same branch of trade, having, on occasion of the late act, compared notes, in the course of enquiry into the methods and process of their respective trades, found them so widely different, tho' to obtain the same end, (that of suiting their manufactures to their respective customers) that they were at a great loss to understand one another, and could not possibly speak to the same facts, respecting the price of wages in each other's trade; and consequently the one could not settle any certain equitable rate, which ought to be paid by the other, in many different instances of their trade. How then is it possible for any set of gentlemen, who must be supposed ignorant of the nature and variety of the trade, (when almost every clothier differs from his neighbour in the process of his manufacture) to reduce it to a certain standard, or frame any equitable rate to answer the purpose, amidst the almost innumerable sorts of goods, which are made by the whole body of clothiers of this country, in their respective trades? Yet it is not to be wondered at, that persons, who are totally strangers to these things, should conclude it practicable,

ticable, when some clothiers, who make but few sorts of goods, have been *weak* and *ignorant* enough to think themselves capable of forming such a scheme; and have actually at the request, and thro' the influence of some gentlemen, or thro' fear, from mistaken views to establish peace, or from *motives of interest*, as it appears since, from what they have done, made a rate, which I come next to speak of.

On *Tuesday* the 2d of *November* last, some clothiers (few of any note) met by appointment with a small number of weavers at *Stroud*, and there formed a rate, which, in order that it should not be examined into by others till it was confirmed, they caused to be sealed up, and not to be opened, till produced at the sessions to be held at *Gloucester* the *Saturday* following.

The clothiers, that attended at the general quarter-sessions, (who had been present at the first meeting at *Stroud*, where they were compelled to sign the exorbitant rate before mentioned) having understood that this sessions was intended to be deemed a *legal Michaelmas quarter-sessions*, in order to put the late act into execution, and also fearing lest any one should be weak enough still to suppose the papers, signed by compulsion on the 11th of *October* at *Stroud*, were voluntary, protested by their attorney against both: which protest prevented the justices from making any rate, in pursuance or by virtue of the authority given by the late act of parliament; yet notwithstanding the rate made at *Stroud* the 2d of *November*, in the manner before described, was confirmed, and signed by six justices of the peace at this, which was an adjourned sessions, according to the customary proceedings of the court. How far it was legal to make such a rate, at a subsequent sessions, not originally appointed for the purpose, when at the general quarter-sessions it had been declared impracticable, merits a

judicial enquiry *; but that it was an inconsistent proceeding, admits of no dispute.

The whole of this rate is full of absurdity, errors and nonsense, but as it is not necessary to my present purpose to point them out, I shall not take up the reader's time about it, because I am very sensible that no rate can possibly be made, but what will be liable, not perhaps to the same blunders, but fully to the same or some other equally important objections. But I cannot pass it by without making one general remark, which is apparently obvious; that almost all the sorts of goods, that are particularly designed for exportation, are considerably advanced in the price of weaving by this rate,† and all the sorts of goods that are lowered in their prices, are such as are made for home consumption.

The weavers soon after the confirmation of this rate returned to their work, though very few clothiers regarded it, except those who were either afraid, or whose interest it was to adopt it. It tended somewhat to amuse, though the most sensible of them, finding all their resources must fail till the next *Michaelmas* quarter-sessions, complied with their master's wages upon the old footing: others more refractory still kept off, and even when they did work, were frequently disputing about their wages, and lodging complaints and informations; thereby occasioning great trouble, and continual hindrance and obstruction to the clothiers in their trade, which is too much encouraged and promoted by some of the neighbouring justices of the peace, who appear resolved not to be convinced of the

* The act of the 5th of *Elizabeth* directs that such rate shall be made at the *Easter* sessions, or within six weeks after.

† The advance to the weavers in wages is more than all the profit made by the clothier on some coarse goods.

inexpediency and impropriety of putting such laws into execution. This is evident from the following instance.

Giles Gardiner, and *Nigell Kingfcote*, Esqrs; having (as is supposed) had some complaints laid before them by weavers touching wages, appointed a sessions at the town of *Minchin-Hampton*, to be held the 18th day of *December* last, and issued out their summons to Mr. *Nathaniel Peach*, and Mr. *Joseph Watben* (clothiers of distinction) to appear before them, at the time and place aforesaid, to answer the matters of complaint alledged against them. It is worthy of note, that both these clothiers were examined, (when the said Justices were present) at the general quarter-sessions, and proved that they had not lowered the price of wages paid to their weavers, since they began trade; and that they paid as much (and one of them, Mr. *Peach*, in some instances more,) than their predecessors in the same trade. In the course of examination it appeared, that these clothiers had made previous agreements with the complainants for a certain or customary price, such as they used to pay, without any regard to the late rate; and that this price had been fully paid them, and no objections made to it on the part of the complainants; and though Mr. *Peach* offered to swear this, and also produced sufficient evidences to prove the same, yet notwithstanding, by authority of the said justices, he has been ordered to pay one of the complainants two shillings and seven pence half-penny more for weaving the said piece of work, and two shillings costs.

I cannot pass by this sessions, without mentioning an extraordinary occurrence that happened on Mr. *Peach's* examination. He offering to confirm by oath what he had alledged, one *Joseph Teacle*, a weaver, (a person not concerned himself in the affair depending before the justices) interrupted him,
by

by loudly exclaiming in an indecent manner against him, and saying, in the presence and hearing of the said justices, and many other persons, *As for Mr. Peach, he will swear any thing.* Teacle was no ways provoked to this behaviour; nor did the justices call upon him to speak in the affair; so that it was perfectly officious in him, and seemingly with design to invalidate the evidence of Mr. Peach. Here was a specimen of that rancorous and incorrigible kind of spirit, which rages in the hearts of our late rioters! Should such dispositions in the common people be encouraged by laws that render them independent? And have not the clothiers cause to complain of such insults, to which they are daily exposed?

Other incendiary and threatening letters have come to hand; many chains have been damaged upon the looms; some weavers have been compelled by rioters to bring home the chains they have taken out, upon the old footing; cloths have been cut and damaged upon the tenters; the shuttles have been taken away by violence, and secured in places and by persons who deserve censure; the weavers tools have been destroyed, and other very extraordinary methods have been used, to prevent those who were inclined to work; the clothiers have been threatened and insulted, the laws suspended; and such is the combination of the weavers, that the most injured amongst them dare not make informations; and though warrants have been granted against some of the most notorious rioters, there is no getting them executed, notwithstanding we have a military force at hand: but all these things not being directly to my purpose, for brevity's sake, I shall omit to enlarge upon them.

Having

Having now drawn a fair state of the case, and finished a narrative of the principal facts, which of themselves point out the necessity the clothiers lie under of making an application for parliamentary relief, or the trade must be inevitably ruined; very little need be added by way of conclusion. The reasons set forth in the remonstrances, and the arguments arising in the course of the narrative, together with the evidence given before the court at the *Michaelmas* quarter-sessions, (for the confirmation of which, as it is here stated, an appeal is made to *Norborne Berkeley, Thomas Hayward, Charles Barrow,* and *John Probyn*, Esqrs. members of the honourable house of commons, and the rest of the justices who attended on the occasion)-----'tis hoped will effectually convince the publick of the inexpediency of making a rate to settle the price of wages to be paid to weavers, and the impossibility of doing it in an equitable manner: yet I cannot dismiss the subject without some general observations.

When trade is in a flourishing state, labour will always find its value, without the intervention of laws: the clothiers cannot help the want of employment, which is the real grievance the weavers labour under; unless they have a greater demand for their manufactures; and raising of wages, which is, in fact, raising them, cannot be supposed to increase that demand. The original intention of those laws which were instituted to rate weavers wages has been greatly perverted in the present case; they were made to prevent unlawful combinations among them, which is evident from their very titles; they were calculated to keep down the price of labour, for by one of the acts the clothier is subjected to a fine, if he pays more than the rate; which demonstrates that the view which the legislative power had in forming them, was to render

our manufactures, (if possible) upon as cheap a footing as those of other countries. But the act of the last sessions, which has been the immediate cause of our late disturbances, and is the principal grievance now complained of by the clothiers, was promoted professedly to raise the price of labour, and consequently enhance the value of our manufactures; the bad effects of which, as it so greatly affects our foreign trade, being so well known, it will be needless here to point out. Instead of preventing unlawful combinations; it has encouraged caballing, fomented discontent, and produced confusion and riot; instead of encreasing our trade, and consequently employment for the weavers, it has already occasioned a total stagnation in a very valuable manufacture for many weeks together, to the great encouragement of our rivals, and the irretrievable loss of the whole country; and these bad effects must necessarily return, unless provision is made to prevent it against another year.

The general disuse of all those laws, which have been made for rating the price of wages to the labouring people, is of itself a sufficient argument against the present grievance; if they are practicable, why are they not executed? But how unequitable would it be to make a rate to fix the price of reaping a field of wheat by the acre, or for threshing any sort of grain by the bushel *, when it is a well known fact, arising from various incidents, that one acre of wheat (and so of other grain) may be worth twice as much the reaping as another; and the same disproportion arises in threshing a bushel of corn. If in so simple a part of labour, therefore, it would be unequal and inexpedient to rate wages, how much more so

* There is a power given by the statute of the fifth of *Elizabeth*, and the first of *James*, to do this.

in a complex manufactory? Would the gentleman or farmer think it not only an hardship, but an absurdity, to be bound by penal laws to pay a certain rate of wages to a tasker or day-labourer, or any other household or menial servant, without having the liberty of making his own bargain, when at the same time he could be served equally well, and much cheaper, without being guilty of oppression, or giving any just cause of complaint? would this be for the encouragement of agriculture? would it not it be deemed oppressive, and afford matter of clamour and loud complaint? and does not this hardship appear still greater, when it is considered that those, who are appointed to make the rate, must necessarily be ignorant of the true value of such labour? For a bench of justices to make a rate for the payment of wages between the clothiers and weavers, in the variety of goods manufactured in this county, is as full of impropriety, as if, supposing them totally ignorant of naval affairs, they should attempt to direct a large fleet of ships, bound on a distant voyage, always to steer such a course, to carry so much sail, and to run exactly so many knots in an hour, without any regard to wind, or tide, or current, or other incidents that must necessarily occur to change their course, and impede their passage.

But how justly soever I may have cause to condemn some mistaken steps, I am verily persuaded that many of the gentlemen, who have been instrumental in promoting the late law, and who were desirous, and endeavoured, to put the same into execution, did it from very humane and generous motives: but how much more would they have relieved the weavers, favoured their own estates, and served the true interest of the clothing trade, and of their country, which are inseparably connected; if instead of putting shackles upon it,

and cramping its natural liberty by unnecessary restraints, and unreasonable penal laws, they had reduced the number of licensed houses for selling ale and spiritous liquors, which are the temptations to idleness and intemperance, seminaries of cabal and sedition, and real sources of poverty and distress? and this was and still is in their power. Were the laws in being against idleness, intemperance, vice, and immorality; duly executed, there would be little, if any ground of complaint; but the labouring manufacturers would conform to the times, and sit down contentedly with brown bread, if they could afford no better; nor should we fear the revival of that trade, which must be for the comfortable support of, and would necessarily benefit, a virtuous and industrious people.

To conclude the whole, the complaints of the weavers appear to arise from quite different causes than the oppressions of their masters, which they have ascribed them to, (but not proved); and was the clothing trade in a flourishing state, no shadow of them would remain. But supposing them real, the remedy, proposed by the late act of parliament, is found by experience to be unequal, impracticable, and inexpedient. The peculiar hardship and restraint upon the clothier, under it, is unparalleled by the actual execution of any other law; and the consequences that would arise from the execution of this law, apparently tend to the utter ruin of this country. Those which have already arisen from the attempts made to put it into execution, (which appear in this narrative) evince the danger and difficulty of interfering between masters and servants in large manufactures. The consequences of restraint, and the abridgment of any equitable liberty or freedom, may be seen from the common migrations of manufactures, and may be considered as national injuries,
equally

equally evident, though somewhat more remote. Our country cannot remain long in peace, nor our trade ever flourish again, whilst this law, and others of the same tendency, remain in their full force, and receive their present countenance : if no relief can be obtained, the æra of its decline is already past, and a few years will usher in its total ruin. Hence our necessity appears : this brings us as petitioners to the legislative power, and to lay our cause open to the publick, humbly submitting it to the wisdom and equity of parliament, where we doubt not, but that, from a true state and knowledge of the case, a seasonable relief will be granted.

F I N I S.

